

Psychotherapeutic Technique: A Brief Overview

Jonathan Haverkampf, M.D.

Introduction

When patients come to see a therapist, they often have a long list of things that do not work for them in their lives. It is easy to overlook that one of the hardest steps towards health has been taken, stepping into the office of a therapist. Psychotherapeutic Technique is then largely about helping the patient find his or her path and to have the courage to follow it. Empathy, common sense, and a good dose of optimism are helpful in this line of work.

Much of what can happen in therapy depends on the expectations of the patient. It determines how much he or she will participate in therapy and contribute to the process in general. This makes it worthwhile to point out early to the basic working in principle in therapy, that the therapist can help patients help themselves, but should under normal circumstances not tell them what to do.

Therapy is about meaning, helping a patient find relevance in things, which also requires looking at values and basic interests. Following one's values and basic interests makes happy. Many people in today's busy and increasingly complex world lose their ability to see relevance in the world and in what they do. Helping people to reconnect what they see in the world with what they value is an important aspect of therapy.

The Therapeutic Relationship

Therapy is an exchange of information, which ultimately should help the patient to lead a happier and more fulfilling life, as well as be free from any symptoms that interfere with these goals.

The therapist should be able to see how patients deal with information and interact with themselves and the world around them. Better communication with oneself and others can lead

to the patient feeling safer, developing greater abilities of introspection and reflection and facilitating a healthier communication with oneself and the environment. All this requires that the therapist has an understanding of the dynamics of interactions in general and of the interactions of the patient in specific, the mutual flow of information and the values, aspirations and interests everyone holds.

Therapeutic work requires empathy and an honest and true interest in the patient and his or her inner worlds. The therapist should also have an interest for the own inner worlds and how they are influenced by the communication of the patient. In psychoanalysis, the concepts of transference and counter-transference are used here.

Values, Interests and Aspirations

The psychodynamic process helps to shift through derivative values and non-derivative values to get to the fundamental values which everyone holds. Here are the things which are really important to the individual, whose pursuit makes happy and life worth living for. To compromise these values causes great suffering and a loss of direction.

Time

To many patients, time has become convoluted. They do not know what to do with their past, are afraid to think about their future, and are caught between past and present which deprives them of the present.

Thinking about values and interests helps to rebuild a future, but this might confront the patient with 'bad decisions' in the past. However, the past cannot be changed, even if we sometimes would like to do so. This means the past has to be accepted and to a certain extent embraced, which is an important process in therapy.

Questions

The most important communication tool one has in psychotherapy is to ask questions. In Socratic questioning the question can lead to insights for both, the patient and the therapist. However, to ask questions that bring greater insight requires having a sense of the type of

answers finds useful. The latter might often not be apparent. Here it helps to remember that patients always suffer from a reduced quality of life, that one cannot live according to one's values, interests and aspirations. Looking at them usually also sheds some light on what interferes living according to them.

One needs to have faith that the interaction between therapist and patient will reveal the information that provides direction in treatment. And this will always happen if there is meaningful communication, which means that something new is communicated every time information travels between the two partners in the interaction. Information can be little gestures or a twitch on the forehead which signal emotions or thought processes, words that can be understood by the other person and in general every signal that can be sent and received by therapist and patient. This requirement is easy to satisfy, if there is a minimal openness to engage in a therapeutic process.

For example:

a. Questioning

"I want to be in control in social situations."

"What does it mean to be in control in social situations?"

"I would feel free, I would not think anymore so much, I would not analyze so much what other people think."

b. Assembling

The next step is to put together the information from the client that reaches the therapist.

"So, you are telling me that you ..."

c. The Logic Test

The logical test is a result from assembling the information. Here contradictions can become clear, or spots that have not been thought about at all. These do not make up the world we imagine, but are the things that have to be overcome to get closer to one's wished states.

d. Imagining

Imagining is that step in which people project their wishes, needs and aspirations into their inner world using building blocks they know from the real world. It is here where we build the world we compare the real world with. This comparison motivates us to change our world, but it can also raise emotions, such as fear or happiness. As emotions have influence over the worlds we imagine, so the worlds we imagine have influence over our emotions.

Our vision of the future plays an especially important role, because it can provide motivation and a sense of direction, as long as it is congruent with the person's underlying values, aspirations and interests.

"Can you imagine what it would be like not to feel socially anxious anymore?"

e. Constructing a Path from the Real World to the imagined world

This requires looking at the changes that may have to be made in the present world to get closer to the imagined world. These thoughts should then lead to behavior changes that get the patient closer to where he/she wants to be.

f. Creating new communication pattern

Change also means we have to communicate with the world in new ways. This grows out of the rediscovered values and interests, the feedback and dynamics in the work with the therapist and the life of the patient outside the therapy. Over time, the new communication patterns should solidify as the patient is reinforced by better interactions with the environment.

Conclusion

Psychotherapy is both, creative and supportive work. It requires a keen eye for the process and the dynamics unfolding within a session. Working with the patient on communication patterns, interaction dynamics, uncovering values and basic interests often goes a long way towards a successful therapy.

© 2012, 2016 Dr Christian Jonathan Haverkamp

jonathanhaverkamp@gmail.com, Dublin

Psychotherapy, Counselling, Medicine (Psychiatric Medication)

www.jonathanhaverkamp.com, www.jonathanhaverkamp.ie

This paper is solely a basis for academic discussion, no medical advice can be given and no medical advice is given. Always consult a professional if you believe you might suffer from a medical condition.